



**Review: [Untitled]**

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*Kenji Mizoguchi: A Guide to References and Resources* by Dudley Andrew; Paul Andrew Audie Bock

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Williams notes, "Some of the *pleasure* given by musical numbers might actually be something closer to *pseudo-bliss*, since the effect, so subtle as to pass generally unperceived, is an implicit loss of coherence of the sustained spectator." One could almost say that the critical prose of Mordden, Croce and Kael also implies a loss of coherence through its absence of sustained theory or argument; in this respect, it seems that the musical and this kind of prose are both predicated on the puritanical assumption that pleasure and intelligence (or analysis) are incompatible bedfellows.

Consequently, in the world of these latter writers, the diverse achievements of the authors of the Altman anthology don't even deserve to be dismissed; instead they are systematically ignored. Thus it seems only logical that in a recent roundup review in *The New Yorker*, Arlene Croce decried the relative absence of intelligent writing about the musical—rightly pointing to the Mordden as a prize catch—while steadfastly refusing to acknowledge the existence of the Altman book, or any related academic endeavors. It may not be irrelevant to add that Altman's book takes a swipe at Croce in turn, in its generally useful bibliography by Jane Feuer, when it refers to her classic book on Astaire and Rogers as "a witty and elegant though superficial analysis." (Alas, the respective professional armor of the journalist and the academic is stronger in both these cases than any sense of allegiance to the unaffiliated reader looking for a good intelligent text on a subject. Croce and Feuer are both witty writers, as it happens, who happen to be answerable to what amounts to rival cults.)

The best so far of the BFI Readers in Film Studies, *Genre: The Musical* is full of interesting ideas about its subject, and fully deserves a place on my shelf right next to Mordden's book. Especially helpful are the remarks by Williams and Feuer about the manner in which musicals, to paraphrase Rick Altman, mobilize radical techniques for conservative purposes. When Richard Dyer remarks, in one of the best essays, that entertainment presents what utopia feels like rather than how it would be organized, he's merely touching upon the existence of a social and ideological structure that most journalists would rather adopt (or adapt) than acknowledge, analyze or contest. Characteristic of this mode is Mordden's show-bizzy

gloss on W. Franklyn Moshier's *The Alice Faye Book* in his own bibliography:

Faye and her films are basic to the musical both historically and today on television, and serious students should put some time in here. A good start: turn to page 98 for a still of what Moshier captions as the "distinctive Faye pose." Try striking this pose yourself, if possible in one of Faye's costumes. How do you feel?

If Mordden's bibliography and Feuer's went out on a blind date, it is difficult to imagine all the comic complications that might ensue. Set those collisions and accommodations to music, and you might even have a hit on your hands. In the meantime, within the mutually exclusive environments fostered by these four books, there is plenty of value to be found in each one. It all depends on what you're looking for, how you feel, and who you are.

—JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

## KENJI MIZOGUCHI A Guide to References and Resources

By Dudley and Paul Andrew. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981. \$35.00.

Film scholar Dudley Andrew and his therapist brother Paul have taken on the complex task of presenting the art and personality of Kenji Mizoguchi with thoroughness, modesty and gusto. The life of this prolific and contradictory Japanese film director has over the years been the subject of at least one film, hommages the world over, countless diatribes, and reams of petty gossip. The Andrew brothers have approached this cacophony with caution, recording and drawing from a wealth of sources for their biographical and critical essays, annotated filmography and outstanding bibliography—the reason this book exists, for the purpose of its publisher G. K. Hall is to provide such reference materials.

This book is doubly welcome in that it avoids the commonest pitfall of the Mizoguchi critique since the early *Cahiers du cinéma* encomiums of the fifties. There has long been a tendency among biographers and reviewers of Mizoguchi to elevate him as a fierce radical crusading for such causes as true cinematic values, or women's rights or freedom of expression for the artist. The opposite side condemns him as a stylistic reactionary, a self-avowed exploiter of women, a slave of political and commercial fashion, and a vicious and

inarticulate director to work with. The Andrew brothers without taking sides present evidence that all of the above are true, but for their own part they make no more polemical statements than the assertion that something about Mizoguchi persists throughout history.

They do, however, offer a new and curious interpretation of Mizoguchi's portrayal of women, which is always the source of lively argument. They make sense of his ambivalence by diagnosing a split in his approach between the period films and the contemporary dramas. In the former they perceive that the female protagonist appears as a spiritual model for the artist, whose role is to preserve and "suffer for an idea of culture that the film valorizes in the end" (p. 28). But in the contemporary dramas, they claim, "such nobility of purpose is no longer so appropriate," and the spirit of anti-male revolt, through which all women will be aided, assumes primary importance. The authors conclude that Mizoguchi's women thus "embody the two great functions [he] prized all his life, personal revolt and artistic vision."

Several assumptions seem to be at work in this line of reasoning, and the films themselves can just as easily call them into question as support them. It remains to be demonstrated that suffering is a necessary part of either artistry or womanhood. The suffering artist is in fact very much a Western post-industrial notion which has been successfully imposed upon the woodblock print artists, such as Mizoguchi's film subject Utamaro, by Westerners infatuated with this popular form—never considered by the Japanese themselves to be high art.

The suffering of women, however, does qualify as "an idea of culture that the film valorizes in the end." This is one of the most disturbing aspects of Mizoguchi's work, for the "idea of culture" is that men will survive, succeed and be redeemed through the suffering of women. Both late nineteenth-century magician Taki no Shiraito and classical Chinese princess Yang Kwei-fei lose their lives for the men they love, but they are fulfilled by their lovers' full recognition of their sacrifice. Unlike the artists to whom they are compared, however, they are not consciously preserving culture; their interests are in an individual man repaying their love beyond the grave. That their actions valorize a culture of male success through guilt over female sacrifice is an effect, rather, of the

film-maker's choice to glorify their suffering.

In this sense the period films by Mizoguchi do not appear to differ greatly from the contemporary dramas. He transforms the feudal-era bawd Oharu into a fragile aristocrat sold into prostitution by her father, but he also shows the Osaka telephone operator Ayako embarking on a life of equal degradation in order to keep her father out of jail. Caught with her samurai lover, Oharu bristles at the disrespectful treatment she receives, but her self-assertion accomplishes no more than does Ayako's complaint that she has been wronged by society. The rebellious outbursts of modern girls like Omocho in *Sisters of the Gion* or the feisty whore played by Kinuyo Tanaka in *Women of the Night* share the same poignancy as Oharu's uncontrollable decline and the escape of the young wife from a bitter and loveless marriage in *A Story from Chikamatsu*. It is not so much that contemporary culture warrants no preservation as that traditional culture persists in the Mizoguchi film. The same values encourage or force his heroines of all eras to suffer and to sacrifice themselves for the men, the artists, who canonize them for it.

The frustrations that occur in making use of this book almost all arise directly from its format, which is undoubtedly not the fault of the authors but a prescription of the publisher. Technical and historical terms such as "shinpa-style" "tendency film" and "Meiji-era" or "-style" are not explained the first time they appear, and there is no glossary or index to aid in defining them. Some of these terms receive no definition until the second "Critical Survey" section of the book. The bibliography is as thorough as any can be on the work of a director who is being discussed in print constantly, and the annotations are useful. The filmographies are likewise remarkably thorough and also provide occasional historical notes on pertinent effects of or on the films. Ideograph appendices and other valuable reference tables abound, but most unfortunately there are no footnotes to the text, and no illustrations for the engaging accounts of the films. This format and such editorial assumptions as the reference to cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa by surname only (page 17), and the consistent failure to translate sums in yen into dollar equivalents, make the book somewhat difficult to use for the uninitiated in Japanese cinema history.

Nevertheless, the authors themselves must be held responsible for errors and deficiencies of observation. These are few. A tobacco pipe is described as "an opium pipe" (p. 37) and conversely, the Japanese are given full credit for a Chinese landscape-painting tradition: the inclusion of small human figures responding to the scenery (p. 39). It may be a bit hasty to describe Kinuyo Tanaka as an actress who became a "successful director" (p. 20). Hers is more like Ida Lupino's "success" as a director than it is like Orson Welles's. Similarly, there may be some doubt as to whether Masai-chi Nagata, a producer whom Japanese film authority Donald Richie has likened to Louis B. Mayer, was as much an "old friend" (p. 18) as he was an exploiter of directors like Mizoguchi.

There can be no argument that Mizoguchi is a unique phenomenon in the history of world cinema, but the authors tend to overzealousness in ascribing some shared traits solely to him. His World War II film *The Loyal 47 Ronin*, for example, is described as "not conventional propaganda for the wartime government" because it included no images of violence (p. 25). It would indeed have appeared unconventional in the context of American or other World War II films, but not so much so in Japan. Most Japanese war films of this period reveal little violence, perhaps because there were so few "enemies" other than a handful of resident Germans who could be recruited as film adversaries. The films seem to concentrate on coping with separation from family and friends, and preparing for death, a context into which the *47 Ronin* fits superbly well.

The assertion that "no other Japanese filmmaker has been more enthralled by stage production of all sorts or has tried to incorporate so many elements of the theater within his films" (p. 31) is a clear case of overenthusiasm. Surely Akira Kurosawa is not to be passed over for his Shakespeare, Noh, Kabuki, and Maxim Gorki adaptations? Or the several younger directors who emerged from and refer to the contemporary theater such as Nagisa Oshima and Shuji Terayama, or Masahiro Shinoda, who has adapted both Kabuki and Bunraku puppet theater for the screen?

But some excess of enthusiasm is certainly forgivable with a subject as intriguing as Mizoguchi. The Andrew brothers have succeeded in an endeavor of overwhelming scope, and

the clarity and thoroughness of their presentation make this an essential English-language reference to have at hand not only for the close study of their immediate subject, but for Japanese cinema as a whole. If they do not pass artistic judgment on individual works and dwell on minor films such as *Utamaro and His Five Women*, this is in pursuit of the goal of introducing the man behind the films, which they have accomplished with grace and ease.

—AUDIE BOCK

## THEORIES OF AUTHORSHIP: A READER

Edited by John Caughie. Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ayer Bldg., Lawrence, MA 08143. \$28.00, 1981.

Now that auteurism no longer sets off virulent polemics, it has become easier to attempt a lucid evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. John Caughie's critical anthology is that evaluation, but it is also something more. His goal, as the title hints, is to situate the auteurist debate within a broader continuum including what preceded the debate—theories of authorship in literature—and what ensued from it—the Marxist and semiotic critique of some of auteurism's underlying assumptions.

Part One ("Auteurism") is subdivided into "Auteurism in Theory"; "The Theory in Practice"; and a "Dossier on John Ford." "Auteurism in Theory" begins, appropriately enough, with Meyer Abrams's "Literature as the Revelation of Personality," whereby Caughie places auteurism within the romantic tradition of "expressive" views of artistic creation. "The Theory in Practice" surveys the auteur theory as it developed in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and was subsequently transplanted to England (*Movie*) and the United States (Sarris and his acolytes). Caughie's selection is judicious and intelligent, although one regrets the briefness of the passages quoted from Truffaut's "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" and Bazin's "La Politique des Auteurs" (both excerpted to the point of virtual disappearance) and the absence of Pauline Kael's lively "Circles and Squares." The "Dossier on John Ford," finally, makes that director a test case for the application of a whole spectrum of auteurist approaches (from Lindsay Anderson to Jean-Louis Comolli), plotting the trajectory by which "Ford of the Movies" becomes 'Ford' as